



Christopher Koelsch, Sebastian Paul and Marybelle Musco President and CEO, LA Opera
James Conlon, Richard Seaver Music Director, LA Opera

present

Book of Mountains and Seas

山海經

Composer and Librettist: Huang Ruo
Director and Production Designer: Basil Twist
Lighting Designer: Ayumu "Poe" Saegusa
Conductor: Miles Lallemand
Producer: Beth Morrison Projects

Puppeteers

Emily Batsford Lute Breuer Ben Elling
Rosa Elling Rachel Schapira Ashley Winkfield

Ars Nova Copenhagen

Anna Schubert Melanie Russell Mari Øyrehagen
Hanne Marie le Fevre Laura Lamph Iris Oja
Luís Toscano James Robinson Jakob Skjoldborg
Asger Lynge Petersen Rasmus Kure Thomsen Mikkel Tuxen

Percussionists

Erica Hou Yuri Inoo



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LA Opera Off Grand productions are supported by a consortium of generous donors to
LA Opera's Contemporary Opera Initiative, chaired by Barry and Nancy Sanders.

This production is dedicated to the loving memory of Stuart Nelson.

Book of Mountains and Seas was commissioned by Beth Morrison Projects, Ars Nova Copenhagen, Moss Arts Center/
Virginia Tech, Soundstreams, Koorbiennale, and Hong Kong New Vision Arts Festival, and Linda & Stuart Nelson.

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on the Arts with the support of the Governor's Office and the New York State Legislature. Additional commissioning
support provided by the Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trusts.

About the Artists

CREATIVE TEAM

Huang Ruo (composer and librettist) has been lauded by *The New York Times* for having "a distinctive style." His vibrant and inventive musical voice draws equal inspiration from Chinese ancient and folk music, Western avant-garde, experimental, noise, natural and processed sound, rock, and jazz to create a seamless, organic integration using a compositional technique he calls "Dimensionalism." His diverse compositional works span from orchestra, chamber music, opera, theater and dance to cross-genre, sound installation, architectural installation, multimedia, experimental improvisation, folk rock and film. His music has been premiered and performed by the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, National Polish Radio Orchestra, Santa Fe Opera, Washington National Opera, Houston Grand Opera and London Sinfonietta. His opera *An American Soldier* had its world premiere at the Opera Theatre of St. Louis in 2018, and was named one of the year's best classical music events by *The New York Times*. He is a composition faculty at the Mannes School of Music and is the artistic director and conductor of Ensemble HERE. He was selected as a Young Leader Fellow by the National Committee on United States-China Relations in 2006. His music is published by Ricordi. (HuangRuo.com)

Basil Twist (director and production designer) is a third-generation puppeteer. He is the sole American to graduate from the École Supérieure Nationale des Arts de la Marionnette in Charleville-Mezieres, France. His showmanship was spotlighted by the Jim Henson International Festival of Puppetry with his award-winning *The Araneidae* Show. This recognition, coupled with the ground-breaking and multiple award-winning *Symphonie Fantastique*, revealed Twist as a singular artist of unlimited imagination. Subsequently, he has created over 20 original full-length works for the stage. Highlights include *Petrushka*, *The Rite of Spring* (Lincoln Center), *Dogugaeshi* (Barbican, Paris, Charleville-Mezieres), *Behind the Lid* (New York) and *Arias with a Twist* (Paris, Stockholm). He was set designer and co-director for *A Streetcar Named Desire* (La Comédie Française). Other operas he has directed and designed include Respighi's *La bella dormiente nel bosco* (Lincoln Center Festival, Spoleto USA) and *Hansel and Gretel* (Houston, Atlanta, Detroit). Ballet collaborations with Christopher Wheeldon include *Cinderella* (Amsterdam, San Francisco), *The Winter's Tale* (Royal Ballet) and *The Nutcracker* (Joffrey). Honors include Obie, Henry Hewes and Doris Duke Artist Awards, multiple UNIMA and Bessie Awards, a Guggenheim fellowship, a MacArthur Fellowship and the Rome Prize. He directs the Dream Music Puppetry Program at HERE in New York. (BasilTwist.com)

Ayumu "Poe" Saegusa (lighting designer) began his career in 2000 in Tokyo, then moved to New York in 2005. After an internship at HERE Arts Center in Soho, he became resident lighting designer there. He served as lighting designer for Culture Mart, an annual festival of HERE's resident artists, from 2006 to 2019, and designed lighting for 20 full productions including *Looking at You* by Kristin Martin and *The Black History Museum* by Zoey Martinson, and countless works in progress and showcases there. He has designed lighting for the New York International Fringe Festival, Lincoln Center and international tours. His credits include Kameron Steel's *Skriker* (Williams College), Basil Twist's *Rite of Spring* (White Light Festival at Lincoln Center) and the Philharmonia Orchestra of New York's 2016-18 seasons at Lincoln Center's Rose Theater.

Ars Nova Copenhagen, founded in 1979, is widely recognized as one of the world's finest vocal ensembles. Ars Nova has worked with Paul Hillier, Bo Holten, Tamás Vető (former chief conductors), Kaspars Putnins, Andrew Lawrence King, Anthony Rooley, Kees Boeke, Michael Bojesen and Søren K. Hansen (all of whom have appeared as guest conductors). The ensemble specializes in the interpretation of the polyphonic choral music of the renaissance and new vocal music. Ars Nova is also building collaborations with creative artists in different fields such as drama, film and ballet, as well as cultivating new modes of concert performance and innovative repertoire. With an annual concert season in Copenhagen, numerous concerts in the rest of Denmark and recurring tours worldwide, the group is now more in demand than ever. Ars Nova has an extensive discography, winning a Grammy for David Lang's little match girl passion. (ArsNova.dk)

Miles Lallémant (conductor), a native of Wales, is the chorus master of Ars Nova Copenhagen. As director of music at St. Matthew's Kensington Olympiam, he co-founded the Kensington Olympia Festival of Music and the Arts with Denis Moriarty. As well as organizing a variety of musical events, the Festival exists as a charitable foundation to give performance experience and other assistance to young musicians. He has worked with Paul Hillier for 14 years, performing and recording a variety of music from the earliest chant to the most recent commissions as part of Chamber Choir Ireland, Ars Nova and Theatre of Voices. He lives in Copenhagen with his harpsichord, organ, baby grand, his partner mezzo-soprano Laura Lamph, and baby Lysander.

Beth Morrison Projects (producer) was founded in 2006 and quickly went from being an industry disruptor to a leader and tastemaker at the forefront of musical and theatrical innovation by commissioning, developing, producing, and touring the groundbreaking new works of living

About the Artists

composers and their collaborators. BMP encourages risk-taking and the result is provocative works that represent a dynamic and lasting legacy for a new American canon. The 2014 bi-coastal expansion to Los Angeles sprang from growing partnerships and relationships with institutions such as LA Opera, the LA Phil, Ford Theatres, Center Theatre Group, BroadStage and RVCC. From 2018 to the present season alone, BMP produced 185 performances on five continents. In 2013, BMP and HERE Arts Center co-founded the PROTOTYPE Festival, which showcases contemporary opera-theater and music-theater projects over ten days each January. (BethMorrisonProjects.org)

Puppeteers

Liza Fennell (puppeteer) Broadway: *War Horse*, *The Pee-wee Herman Show*, *Radio City Christmas Spectacular*. Regional: New Victory Theater, La Jolla Playhouse, Off-Broadway Public Theater, Delacorte and the Spoleto, Edinburgh and Lincoln Center Festivals. International: Brazil, Korea, China and Ireland. He worked with Basil Twist on *Hansel and Gretel* at Detroit Opera. When not in puppetland, he is a screenwriter.

Ben Elling (puppeteer) is a puppeteer and theatrical technician. He has worked extensively as an audio/video engineer and freelance technical director for several Off-Broadway productions. In addition to his technical work, Ben has puppeteered in Basil Twist's *Rite of Spring* at Lincoln Center and in *Symphonie Fantastique* at HERE.

Rosa Elling (puppeteer) is a performer and puppet maker from Sheffield, England. Rosa trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama puppetry program then worked as a fabricator for Nick Barnes Studios before moving to NYC in 2015. Rosa has worked on Tandem Otter projects ever since. Yay puppets!

Emily Batsford (puppeteer)(she/they) is an NYC-based puppeteer and theater maker. International: *Song of the North* (Hamid Rahmanian), *PACKRAT* (Concrete Temple Theatre), *Unfolding* (Margarita Blush Productions). New York: *The Eye Which We Do Not Have* (HERE), *Set in Stone* (Sara Stern), *End of the World* (Center at West Park), *Stop Motion* (Theater for a New City), *Touch* (59E59), *The Brightness of Heaven* (Cherry Lane). @efcbatsford

Rachel Schapira (puppeteer/puppet build chief) is a co-founder of Eat Drink Tell Your Friends Puppetry Collective. Rachel has worked with Basil Twist, *Welcome to Campfire*, *Ripe Time*, *The Story Pirates*, *New Georges*, *Opera Slavica*, and Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew. She is a teaching artist with Red Hook Art Project, a 2019 Henson Grant recipient, and a member of a monster trux collective.

Ashley Winkfield (puppeteer) (xe/them) was introduced to puppetry through Basil Twist's *Rite of Spring* and includes puppetry in every artform they encounter, including *Only Child*'s immersive aerial experience *Two Fold*. Ashley has puppeteered in Rachael Shane's *The Paper Piece*, Mabou Mine's China tour of *Animal Magnetism* and Torry Bend's *The Paper Hat Game and Dreaming*. AshleyWinkfield.com Instagram: @ashleyk.music

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About the Performance

About *Book of Mountains and Seas*: A Note by Huang Ruo

Book of Mountains and Seas (山海經) is a work of vocal theater for 12 singers, six puppeteers and two percussionists. It is inspired by the ancient Chinese compilation of early myths of the same title, which was first transcribed in the fourth century B.C. Over the years, these mythological stories have become part of Chinese written and oral history, shifted and reshaped to match our contemporary times. This is a 21st-century adaptation and expansion of four of these tales. Its lyrics are based on the original Chinese texts from the book, with additional newly created words to complete the soundscape and symbolic drama. As the four tales are ancient, they are abstract and timeless. *Book of Mountains and Seas* contains timeless codes about the universe, creation, planet, nature, life, human ambition and fate, the relationship and interaction between mankind and the planet, etc.

Scene One: *The Legend of Pangu* (盤古開天地)

The creation of our planet is told in this story. *The Legend of Pangu* illuminates the Earth's birth from a cosmic egg that contained the hairy giant Pangu. He separates the egg's parts into the yin and the yang—to create the Earth and the sky, which he held apart for 18,000 years. As Pangu grew, the egg moved further from the Earth. When he died, his body became the sun, moon, stars, mountains, rivers, animals, minerals, vegetation, rains, winds, and finally, humans of our planet.

Scene Two: *The Spirit Bird* (精衛填海)

The Spirit Bird focuses on the relationship between a tiny helpless bird and the vast powerful sea through a tale of an impossible yet persistent revenge. A princess named Nü Wā drowns at sea. Her spirit takes over the body of a bird, and for the rest of time she attempts to exact revenge on the water, filling the sea with twigs and pebbles.

Scene Three: *The Legend of Ten Suns* (后羿射日)

A continuation of the creation story, scene three is based on the story of the ten suns, who are the children of Mother Xi Hé and Di Jùn, god of the eastern heaven. The ten suns peacefully resided on a mulberry tree in the eastern sea. Each sun revolved around Earth in formation riding a sun bird, a routine that they tired of. One day, the ten suns decided to fly out together, which shriveled the crops, dried up the water, and caused animals and humans to die. Hou Yi, god of archery, was called upon to help control his children. Hou Yi killed nine of the suns, sparing the last to leave Earth with light. Out of fear, the remaining sun remains faithful to his fixed schedule of flight, which creates night and day.

Scene Four: *Kuā Fù Chasing the Sun* (誇父逐日)

Kuā Fù was a giant who wished to capture the sun. Kuā Fù

was perplexed by the sun's whereabouts at night and decided to chase and catch the sun. With each stride he got closer to the sun, however, he could never catch up to it. He followed the sun from the East to the West, draining all rivers and lakes crossing his path as sources of water to quench his burning thirst as he closed in on the star. However, he couldn't finish his quest because he died of the extreme heat and exhaustion. When he died, he dropped his walking stick on the ground, which grew into forests of peach blossom trees.

These myths will be reinterpreted through the lens of our modern-day relationship with the world we live in. The two creation stories conjure a sense of respect and awe for the universe and environment. In *The Legend of Pangu*, the humble lesson to learn is that humans, although they are the rulers of our planet now, are created last. They are created as equally as everything else. However, do humans respect the nature and the natural process of universal order? In *The Spirit Bird*, this intriguing story asks important questions: is weak force always meant to submit and surrender to strong force? Is endless revenge always meaningless? In *Kuā Fù Chasing the Sun*, it is illustrated that the ambition of human beings and our belief that nature can be conquered and consumed endlessly will eventually backfire on us. Maybe in this apocalyptic moment of the world, nature gets the last laugh and will survive beyond us.

LA Opera's Contemporary Opera Initiative

Chaired by Barry and Nancy Sanders, the Contemporary Opera Initiative supports the company's efforts to advance the art form through the cultivation of new voices and new visions. The initiative's generous supporters have provided vital funding for a particularly adventurous range of contemporary works on the main stage and through LA Opera Off Grand, including Gabriela Lena Frank's *El último sueño de Frida y Diego*, Philip Glass's *Satyagraha* and the world premiere of Matthew Aucoin's *Euridice* at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, David T. Little's *Soldier Songs* at the Ford Theatres, David Lang's *the loser* at the Theatre at Ace Hotel, and the world premiere of Ellen Reid's Pulitzer Prize-winning *prism* at REDCAT. Thanks to the initiative, LA Opera also commissioned and produced 11 Digital Shorts, an initiative launched during the pandemic while our stages were dark.

Coming up on our main stage, Joel Thompson's monodrama *Fire and Blue Sky*, created especially for tenor Russell Thomas, will have its world premiere on June 6, 2024, and Osvaldo Golijov's *Ainadamar* will have its company premiere in April 2025. Continuing our special collaboration with Beth Morrison Projects, Mary Kouyoumdjian's *Adoration* will open at REDCAT in February 2025. We invite you to join us in exploring, behind the scenes, how the vision of these artists comes to life.